

VZCZCXRO2500
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV
DE RUEHCV #0716/01 1442154
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 232154Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1176
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000716

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: DANCING DEVILS AID CAPRILES DURING ATTACK BY
CHAVISTA MOB

REF: 07 CARACAS 01690

CARACAS 00000716 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. Chavistas attacked Baruta Mayor Henrique Capriles Radonski May 22 as he attempted to participate in Corpus Christi Day activities in Yare, Miranda state. Capriles was harassed by Glen Rivas, an ardent Chavista and president of the Miranda state assembly, and told to depart Yare. Rivas' supporters scuffled with Capriles' team when the mayor refused to leave. A fraternal order of masked folklore performers known as the Dancing Devils came to Capriles' assistance. Capriles, who is running for the Miranda governorship in the November elections, left the scene unharmed. The use of blatant violence early in the campaign season, particularly at a non-political event, is significant. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) knows it is vulnerable and that politicization is high. While Rivas represents a small sector of hard-line Chavismo, his thugs sent a clear message to the opposition that the government will not easily cede Miranda state, currently controlled by a Chavista confidant, in the November elections. End Summary.

Chavista Tempers Flare

12. (SBU) A mob of red-shirted Chavistas attacked Baruta Mayor Henrique Capriles on May 22 as he attended the popular religious and folkloric ceremonies associated with the Feast of Corpus Christi in Yare, Miranda state. Following the incident, Capriles told the media that Glen Rivas, president of the Miranda state legislature and a hard-line Chavista, approached him in an outdoor plaza and ordered him to leave Yare. Capriles refused and insisted he had a right to participate in the day's events. Rivas reportedly told Capriles that the Catholic mass and subsequent festivities would not commence until the mayor departed. Capriles says he retreated from the immediate area to defuse the situation.

13. (SBU) Upon Capriles' return to watch a performance by a fraternal order known as the Dancing Devils, however, Rivas threw a water bottle at him. The state legislator's men then scuffled with Capriles' companions. The dancers came to Capriles' assistance and held the Chavistas at bay with their wooden dancing sticks. Rivas' men, some of which were reportedly armed, left. (Note: Rivas has a history of resorting to violence. In early 2007, his supporters

physically attacked reporters affiliated with the opposition media (Reftel). Rivas is also reportedly a close ally of current Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello. End Note.)

Red on Red Violence

14. (SBU) Corpus Christi celebrations and the Dancing Devils of Yare attract thousands of local and international tourists each year. Footage of the May 22 incident is unclear because both Chavistas and the dancers donned red outfits. The dancers, however, can be distinguished by a red head covering over which a colorful paper mache mask is often worn. Meanwhile, the Chavistas are identifiable by their red, short sleeve polo shirts and red baseball caps. In his statements to the press, Capriles thanked the Dancing Devils for warding off his attackers.

Background

15. (SBU) Capriles of Primero Justicia is running for the Miranda governorship in the November elections. Former Miranda Governor Enrique Mendoza is also running and reportedly leads Capriles among opposition candidates in the polls. The Comptroller's Office, however, has declared Mendoza ineligible to run, citing an old administrative sanction. President Chavez' United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) is likely to endorse the re-election of loyalist Diosdado Cabello. Capriles claims he was not campaigning in Yare at the time of the incident, but the Chavistas who attacked him likely interpreted his presence at the events as an unwelcomed political move.

CARACAS 00000716 002.2 OF 002

Comment

16. (C) Public outbursts of violence, such as the one perpetrated against Capriles, underscore the high levels of polarization that exist in Venezuela even at the early stages of the election season. Incidents such as this are cause for concern particularly if radical sectors of Chavismo, like that of Glen Rivas, are allowed to act with impunity. It is unknown whether Rivas' actions were sanctioned, but they indicate that the battle for the Miranda governorship, like all other closely contested state and local races slated for November, will be contentious.

DUDDY